

SPIRITUAL MESSAGE

For Those who Reason

**Courage is resistance to fear,
mastery of fear, not absence
of fear**



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The Concept of Spirituality in Islam

Spirituality as a philosophy has a long history of 5 thousand years. In ancient Greece there were great philosophers like Plato and Aristotle whose thinking was spiritual in character. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, spiritualism is the philosophy of higher reality, which has been defined by different philosophers in different words such as, "immaterial reality," "a universal mind," "a supreme being", "spiritual cosmic force," "infinite personal God," etc..

Spirituality, being a subjective discipline, it cannot be described in objective terms. Every person is composed of two things—body and spirit. The body is related to objective science while the spirit is related to subjective science.

There are two different concepts of spirituality: God-oriented spirituality which is based on the concept of God Almighty, and man-oriented spirituality, which is based on man's soul itself being the treasure-house of spirituality. As for the former concept spirituality results in God-realization while in the latter, spirituality results from self-realization.

The concept of self-realization is based on the assumption that the treasure of spirituality exists within man himself. And through meditation man can peep into his inner self and discover spirituality. This concept has been explained by Acharya Rajneesh in his book, "Kundalini Andar Base". However this concept of man-oriented spirituality called "indwelling God" by Pandu Rang Shashtri, founder of the Swadhyaye Movement, is not corroborated by Islam. According to Islam man has no such spiritual treasure house existing independently. For man is a taker-creature. He receives everything from his Creator. Without understanding this basic point we shall not be able to understand man himself.

The concept of spirituality in Islam is based on the principle of God-realization. According to this concept, God is the treasure house of all virtues. And when man's contact with God is established, in the world of his feelings, at the psychological level, an unseen revolution is brought about. This inner revolution is called spirituality. In this matter the relationship between Man and God can be likened to an electric wire and the power house. When the wire is connected to the power house, electricity is produced, and the place is lit up. In this way, light is the result of the wire's connection to the power house of God.

Human nature is like an inflammable element. When an inflammable element like petrol comes near fire, it is ignited. Similarly, human nature is awakened when it comes in contact with God.

This finds expression in the Quran in these words:

"Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The metaphor of His light is that of a niche in which there is a lamp, the lamp inside a glass, the glass like a brilliant star, lit by a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would well-nigh glow forth even though fire did not touch it. Light upon light! Allah guides to His light whoever He wills. And Allah sets forth parables to men, and Allah has knowledge of all things." (24:36)

This is a compound Simile. 'Light' here means the guidance of Almighty, 'niche' means the human heart and 'lamp' denotes the capability to receive divine inspiration. Glass and oil elaborate upon this receptivity.

'Glass' shows that this receptivity has been lodged in the human heart, protected from outside influences, and clear oil indicates that this receptivity is very strong and is eagerly waiting to receive inspiration.

This verse makes it clear that, on the one hand, is God, the source of inspiration, and on the other, is the consciousness of spirituality (God-consciousness) with which man is born. In this way when these two things come together, Islamic spirituality comes into existence. This is indeed another name for the awakening of God-consciousness. When it reaches its highest stage the believer's realization of God reaches that point where he begins to feel consciously in his worship that he is seeing God and that if he is not seeing God, God is seeing him. If the first type of experience is called direct spiritual experience, the second—type may be termed indirect spiritual experience.

As the Quran tells us, "Prostrate yourself and draw near." (96:19) For God is always close to us—closer than the life blood in the jugular vein (50:16). By total surrender to God, the soul can realise nearness to God.

Similarly, according to this hadith, 'Worship God as if you are seeing him' (Sahih Al-Bukhari) when man engages himself in true devotion, he is linked with God at a sensory or psychological level. He comes close to God. Through an invisible cord he comes in contact with God, God's light passes through him. His entire existence comes to be pervaded by this indescribable feeling, which is called spiritual experience. This is called *Rabbaniyat* in the Quran (Be people of the Lord 3:79). *Rabbani* means one whose thinking, and whose actions are God-oriented, who has placed God at the centre of his attention. When an individual attains spirituality, his state becomes like a lamp lit all of a sudden. He undergoes spiritual experiences. His heart becomes an ocean of spiritual waves. He appears to live in this world, but he has found another far superior world for himself.

These spiritual experiences cannot be explained in words. Everything in the universe seems to convey to him a divine message. The leaves of the tree become a thrilling experience. A waft of air gives him a message of truth. He can hear divine music in the waves of the river and the chirping of the birds.

Due to his high state of receptivity, he reaches the stage where the wavelength of God and man becomes one. And he is enabled, in the words of the Prophet, "to see with God's eye, to speak with God's tongue, to walk with God's foot, to hear with the ear of God. "Then all limitations vanish and his day and night are spent in God's neighbourhood. All this can be felt, not described in words. This can be explained with the example of a child who has limitless love for his mother. He knows it himself in the full sense but he cannot fully describe it in words. The same is true of spirituality.

When a person is linked with the source of spirituality, he undergoes such spiritual experiences as he himself fully understands, but has difficulty in conveying to others. He may describe some external signs

but he cannot describe inner reality.

Although it is difficult to describe the inner reality of spirituality, its method of attainment can be described to a certain extent and followed by others.

1. First of all man has to free his mind from confusion. It is difficult for a confused mind to undergo spiritual experiences. The basic reason for confused thinking is that man is not able to differentiate between the real and the superficial, the relevant and the irrelevant, rational thinking and superstition, logical and illogical statements.

One who thinks thus will always remain in a state of mental confusion. He will never be able to find the straight path. As a result, his spiritual journey will never be started.

2. On the path of spirituality one cannot be one's own guide. And one certainly needs a guide. This guide is the Quran. It is an authentic, and carefully preserved book of God. That is why the Quran can be trusted as a guide by the spiritual traveller. After making the Quran one's guide, one can set one's spiritual journey on the right track.

3. This spiritual journey demands a change in lifestyle. This lifestyle for a spiritual traveller may be put briefly in these words: 'Simple living and high thinking.' Simple living means limiting one's worldly requirements to the minimum, assiduously avoiding comfort and luxury. That is why the Sufis used to wear coarse clothes as a symbol of the simple life. It helps the traveller in his spiritual journey. High thinking means that his thoughts are not embroiled in material things. By engaging one's mind in higher realities, one becomes a recipient of divine inspiration. This inspiration of divine light comes to his mind uninterruptedly, igniting his whole existence.

4. The Quran attaches great importance to reflection and serious thought. There are a number of verses in the Quran that indicate that innumerable signs of God are extant in the heavens and the earth. The observance of God's signs is the greatest source of spirituality.

Spirituality called *Rabbaniat* in the Quran, involves focussing the mind on higher, non-material realities. Materialism is the opposite, indeed, the anathema of spirituality. For attaining spiritual states one has to rise above material things, and focus his attention on non-material things. Those who succeed in this are the spiritual or godly servants of God. As the Quran says: "Be godly servants of God." (3:79).

The truly spiritual person does not enjoy material comforts and luxuries. He feels no desire to acquire them. He feels they have no attraction for him. For he is engrossed in the higher realities of spiritual life. This spiritual experience that comes to him from reflecting upon the signs of God is far superior to what one experiences in leading a worldly life. The greatest source of pleasure for him is the remembrance of God. It is this reality, which finds expression in this verse of the Quran: "It is only in the remembrance of God that hearts are comforted." (13:28).

Here comfort means peace of mind that stems from God Almighty. For, true and lasting comfort

can be achieved only through the Perfect Being. One who discovers the secret of living on an elevated plane of spirituality, has discovered a life of limitlessness. Thus if materialism is to live a life of limitations, spirituality is to live in limitlessness.

We learn from the Quran that the universe has been fashioned by God in a way that it may become a source of spiritual inspiration for man. According to the Qur'an, it is the quality of *Tawassum* (15:75) that enables one to find inspiration in the universe. *Tawassum* is the ability to understand the signs of nature. That is, to observe the phenomena of the universe in order to draw lessons from them and receive spiritual nourishment from physical events.

That is to say, a truly religious person is able to convert physical events into spiritual lessons. He derives spiritual nourishment from material things. The Quran has described how godly people continuously derive such sustenance from their environment, thus maintaining their intellectual and spiritual well being. This is elaborated upon in the Quran as follows:

"In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of night and day, there are signs for men of understanding; those that remember God while standing, sitting, and lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth (saying): 'Lord, You have not created these in vain. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the fire' (3:191)

Meditation is essential for developing our spirituality. Meditation is a high kind of contemplation. It is not a state of silence, but a deep kind of thinking process. It takes us from the seen world to the unseen, from darkness to light, from chaos to conviction, from limitation to limitlessness, from word to meaning. It is like a door through which one enters another world. In short, from the human world we reach the divine world.

The concept of meditation is based in Islam on two things, *At Tafakkur* and *Tadabbur* (3:191, 4:82).

Abu Darda was a senior companion of the Prophet. After his death a man came to his wife and asked her what was the most important form of worship performed by Abu Darda. She replied: He would spend the whole day thinking, thinking, thinking. According to this, Islamic meditation is a thinking process rather than the cessation of intellectual activity. The Quran further tells us that this intellectual process has two different directions—*Al-Anfus* and *Al-Afaq*. *Al-Anfus* literally means soul, that is, inner world; *Al-Afaq* literally means universe, that is, external world.

So when a believer sees the universe functioning in a perfect manner and he finds that all the events in this vast universe always proceed towards a meaningful result, he realises that man's life too must have a meaningful end. This makes him exclaim: O our Lord! You have not created all this without purpose. Glory be to you! Give us salvation in the life to come (3:191).

Thus the universe is a manifestation of God's attributes. Hence, it is a source of spiritual nourishment

for those who want to lead a divine life on earth. For them, the whole universe becomes an important means of reaching spiritual perfection. This spiritual development continues throughout their earthly life till a time comes when they attain that degree of spirituality which the Quran calls the 'Rabbani soul.' It is souls such as these who, in the life Hereafter, will inhabit paradise. Our most compassionate Lord will say: "Dwell in Paradise; you shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve." (7:49).

There is nothing mysterious about spirituality in Islam. It is rather the direct result of the kind of intellectual development that takes place when a believer ponders over the Creator and His creation: he gains something in the process that may be termed spirituality. The source, therefore, of Islamic spirituality is observation and reflection, rather than any sort of mysterious exercises.

We learn from the Quran that in the very creation of the universe, the signs of God lie hidden all around us. One who has developed keen awareness when he reflects upon the things of the world is able to see the Creator in his creatures. The meaning of the creation of the Universe is laid bare before him. Ultimately, the universe becomes a permanent source of spiritual inspiration. He is continuously nourished by it during his worldly experience.

A believer is not supposed to shun his normal life in order to lead a life of observation and contemplation. Islam does not advocate withdrawing from the world. He has to live in this world and participate in its activities. What is desired from him is that while fulfilling all his duties, his heart should not be attached to worldly affairs. In this way he continues to gain spiritually.

Once a noted scientist said that only a prepared mind can make a scientific discovery. The same can be said of meditation. Here also a prepared soul alone can benefit from it. First of all *Tazkia*, purification of the soul, has to be done through meditation. *Tazkia* aims at clearing one's heart of all kinds of negative sentiments, otherwise meditation will not work. There is a very interesting story which illustrates this point.

A milkman came to Gautam Buddha and asked him to give him *Gyan*, i.e. the realization of truth. Gautam Buddha asked: "Would you like the milk to be put in an unclean container?" The milkman said, "No. First of all we must clean the container and only then can we put the milk in it." Gautam Buddha then said, 'The same is true of realization. Realization can be put only in a clean container. First of all, you have to cleanse your heart and mind of all kinds of moral pollution. Only after this cleaning process will you be able to receive the truth.'

The preparation during the pre-meditation period is very important. Anyone who desires to benefit from meditation will have to complete this pre-meditation course based on simple living and high thinking.

Jesus Christ once said: Man cannot live by bread alone. It means that physical food cannot provide complete fulfillment to man. It requires something more. This something more is spirituality. If food is needed for the nourishment of the body, spirituality is needed for the nourishment of the soul. Both are required for the complete development of the human personality.

The human body is nourished by material food as is known to all of us. But the question arises as to how our soul receives its nourishment. The position the soul can be likened to ore, and the position of spirituality can be likened to steel. Then how this ore is to be developed into spirituality? High thinking alone provides the answer to this question. This means thinking by rising above the mundane.

Meditation in Islam aims at bringing man closer to God. When man worships God, when he remembers Him, when his heart is turned towards Him with full concentration, when he makes a request or a plea, he establishes a rapport with his Maker. In the words of the Hadith, at that particular moment he comes to whisper with his Lord. He has the tangible feeling that he is pouring his heart out to God and that God in turn is answering his call.

When this communion is established between God and man, man can feel himself becoming imbued with a special kind of peace. His eyes are moist with tears. He starts receiving inspiration from God.

According to a *hadith* the Prophet Muhammad said the highest form of worship is to pray as if you were seeing God. We learn from this *hadith* the true sign of a superior form of worship. The true sign is for man to sense the presence of God during worship, and feel that he has come close to God. That is when he can experience the refreshing, cooling effect of God's love and blessings for man. It is this feeling of closeness to God which is the highest form of spiritual experience. In chapter 96, the Quran says: "Do *Sajdah* (self-prostration) and come nearer to God." (96:19).

This *Sajdah* is the highest form of meditation. *Sajdah* is a form of unification of soul and body. According to this Quranic verse, *Sajdah* is the meeting point between God and man.

Sajdah is the sign of submission or surrender, for it is only in a state of submission or surrender that we can meet God Almighty. *Sajdah* is the final position of submission for acquiring a place very close to God.

Status of Women in Islam

I would like to say a few things regarding the status of women in Islam. For the status of women in Islam. We hear for the first time that Islam degrades women in from an anthology of the Quran prepared by Edward Lane a century and a half ago. He stated in its introduction that the fatal point of Islam was the degradation of women since then it has been accepted as an established fact.

First Let's have a look at the status of women prior to Islam or in the ancient world.

The first women according to Greek mythology was Pandora who was sent to earth by Zeus the king of gods. Pandora came with a box full of wickedness and evil when she opened the box the world was plagued with all kinds of misery and sorrow. So in this way the woman came to be associated with all evils.

This fanciful story was later incorporated into the religious texts. According to the Bible the first man Adam and the first woman Eve were placed in Heaven God asked them to eat the fruits of all the trees in paradise except of one tree. But one day Satan found the opportunity to tempt Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. Satan told her that if she took that fruit she will be come immortal like angels. Then after partaking of the fruit Eve managed to tempt Adam into eating the fruit. When God learnt of it. He asked them why they had disobeyed. Adam said to God that it was this woman whom you gave me who made me eat the fruit. God in punishment expelled them from heaven which was a life of bliss. They were thrown in a world which was full of misery if and sorrow. And through this act of disobedience mankind came to share the burden of original sin.

Now let's compare the same incident in the words of the Quran. According to the Quran too Adam and Eve were the first man and woman created by God. They were in habited in Paradise with all comfort and bliss. One day Satan managed to tempt them into eating the forbidden fruit. Here one thing must be noted. (As we know in Arabic there are three forms of a verb, singular, dual and plural. Throughout this narration running into several verses the Quran uses dual verb form.)

That is to say, both Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan together and they ate the fruit together and together they incurred God's displeasure and were sent to the world together.

Then how can we say that Islam intends to degrade women. Actually the misgiving arises from the division of labour. Women in broad division are assigned Home Affairs Department, that is, indoor jobs while men are assigned outdoor jobs.

This has nothing to do with injustice Roles of men and women which are assigned to them by nature itself. Both are competent in their own fields. But once they are taken out of their field they will be a miserable failure as we see in the west. Where women are concentrated in show business, secretary jobs, and other departs of recreation.

As we all know even among men all are not assigned the same roles. The talents of the people

differ and accordingly they chose their careers. Let's take University itself. There are different types of work assigned to different people. This does not mean that University is degrading men. This is not degrading but division of labour without this division of labour the world would come to a standstill if everyone wanted to do the same job.

I am reminded of a real amusing situation that took place once when Dr. Allama Iqbal was presiding a large gathering. Gama Pahalwan was going to make a speech. With great difficulty he was persuaded to come to the mike. He could only utter the words Bhaiyo Warzish Kiya karo. And he was utterly perspiring profusely. So this is the plight that the west has produced. Women have all come out but in no field they excel. They are unable to stand before men when they came to work hard. In this way they have degraded themselves and what they have achieved in return is double responsibility of office and of home. The western woman today is reeling under this burden but there is no way out for her. Her home has broken down as a result of her exodus from homes. Now she has no props to stand.

Since the prestige of western civilization is involved, the intellectuals are yet not willing to admit their mistaking in taking women out.

Over the last 20 years innumerable researches have been carried out on this subject and all these researchers have proved in no uncertain turns that the woman is different from man. Those who still hold that biologically both are equal show their complete ignorance of the developments made in the western world of all the researches conducted there which have shown that from the first day, nay even before the baby sees the light of day it shows different reactions. Female child is more sensitive, more delicate, wants more protections, and is more passive. While male child is more aggressive since day one. Who can condition the new born to show different reaction. The theory of social conditioning has nothing to do with the truth.

Islam accords full status of respect and honour. It says that they are equal but different. They have to play different roles in society. All the roles command equal respect.

Rather Islam grants more respects to women than men. I'll just narrate two Hadith in this respect. According to one Hadith the Prophet observed Paradise is under the feet of mother.

According to another Hadith once a man came to the Prophet and asked him who rightfully deserves the best treatment from me. Your mother, said the Prophet. Who's next asked the man. Your mother who comes next, the man asked again, the Prophet again replied your mother.

Who is after that insisted the man. Your father said the Prophet. A member of such a society who shows full respect to a woman as a mother will, of necessity, become more and more caring in regard to other women.

The Concept of the State in Islam

In order to explain the concept of the state in Islam, I would like to quote some of the relevant verses from the Quran.

Say: "O God! Lord of Power, You give power to whom You please, and You take away power from whom You please." (3:26).

Some points are made here very clearly: one being that the actual possessor of power is God and that it is He who grants power on earth to whom He wants and who takes away power from whoever He wants. So the whole matter in this regard rests with God. If someone receives Power, it is not due to his own effort: it is given to him by God alone. Similarly, when power is taken away from him, it is done by God alone.

Thus the dominance or subjugation of any group is ultimately for God to decide. According to this verse, no human being has any power whatsoever. The theory that comes to light is that political power is totally governed by God, just as the entire universe is running in accordance with the divine plan. It is like saying that God alone is the controller of the universe and that He alone has the final word as to who is going to be given political power. Just as God exercises full power over the setting and rising of the sun, so also has He full power over the granting of political ascendancy.

This is an incontrovertible fact. There is another verse in this connection which throws further light on the issue:

"And He will bestow upon you other blessings which you desire; help from God and a speedy victory." (61:14).

In this verse "other blessings" means political power. This has been characterized as something secondary. When we take this verse in its literal sense, it transpires that the status of political power has a secondary rather than a primary position in Islam. Primary position is given to the purification of the self through intellectual and spiritual development.

Another point made clear in this verse is that the receiving of political power depends solely upon divine succour. Victory and defeat apparently belong to the human world, but both are totally governed by God.

As we learn from the Quran:

Whomsoever may God grant victory and whomsoever may God grant defeat.

The above is another verse from the Quran which explains this matter further. If we take this verse literally, it emerges that political power is a promise from God, and not a target. That is, it is not

something that Muslims should aim at for they can receive it only by divine edict.

Another point that we learn from this verse is that power is not granted to any group simply because of its struggle to that end, but rather on the fulfillment of two specific conditions. The Quran makes it clear that True Faith and virtuous character alone are the deciding factors in receiving political power.

What is meant by faith is that the group who is to be the recipient of political power should have undergone the intellectual and spiritual revolution called Iman (Faith) in the Quran, that is, they should evince absolute trust in God, total submission to the Prophet, full conviction on the existence of the angels, of the hereafter, of hell and heaven; in short, they should display a keen desire to mould their lives in accordance with the spirit of the Quran. When such qualities of faith are produced within a group, the time will come for it to be considered by God for the grant of political power. Good deeds necessarily entail full conformance to the divine commands regarding worship, moral character and the upholding of justice. In the words of the Quran, our lives should be wholly dyed in God's hue. When this quality of good character has been developed in the majority of the people only then is political power given to that group by God's command.

Then there is another verse in this connection which throws further light on the subject.

This is in the context of the granting of political power to the Prophet David. The words uttered by the Prophet David after receiving power was 'Leabluani' (This is meant as a test). These words tell us that political power is given in order to try us. The test contrives to separate the grateful from the insolent servants of God.

Thus, according to the Quran, the nature of political power in this world is exactly the same as that of other things. That is, when an individual is given wealth, children or any material, of worldly nature like success, all that is designed to test him. All these blessings serve as test papers. Thus political power is also a test paper.

Therefore, according to the Quran whoever receives power should realize that power is given to him in order to test him. It is not something to take pride in, nor is nearly a matter of being a gift from God.

The concept of the State that emerges from these verses of the Quran make it clear that political power is not the target or goal of our activities or actions. Rather it is the result of some other set of actions. That is to say, according to the Quran, the objectives of our struggle should be faith and good character. These conditions have to be fulfilled and only then can a group be blessed with political power by God, if He so desires. We might say, by way of analogy, that the position of faith is that of the seed and the position of power is that of the fruit.

According the Quran, the whole matter can be likened to a tree. The position of the seed in this example is that of action and the position of the fruit is that of receiving the reward of that action. In this way those who sow the seed of Iman and good deeds may receive political power the gift from God.

We must then consult the Quran and Sunnat as to what is the structure of political power in Islam. In the Quran, the first principle that comes before us is in the form of approbation of:

"those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation." (42:38).

This verse alludes to a basic principle of conduct so far as the political structure of Islam is concerned. This shows that the political system of Islam is based on mutual adjustment, this being one of the most important social principles of Islam, which is equally desirable both prior to and after receiving political power.

It is noteworthy that this verse enjoining Muslims to settle their affairs by consultation was revealed in Makkah, whereas Muslims received political power only in Madinah after their migration. The revelation of this verse in Makkah shows that this principle of consultation is an all-time social principle. The practical proof of this principle at all times is made clear by the fact that whenever any social problems arose, the Prophet would always call his companions for consultation.

Therefore we find in the books of seerah (prophet's biography) a number of examples which begin with these words, "O people, give me advice."

After the death of the Prophet in Madinah in 632, Abu Bakr Siddique was appointed as a leader of the Believers, and first successor of the Prophet. Events tell us that the Prophet was of the opinion that this task of leadership should go to Abu Bakr, but he never nominated the latter, nor did he prepare a will.

There were, however, certain indications during the lifetime of his wishes. For instance, the task of congregational prayer is only which is performed only by the head of the State. That is why the Prophet of Islam used to lead the prayer himself. For, according to Islam, the Imam of the mosque should be one who is the leader of the political institution, or he could be one appointed by the head of the State as his deputy. It is significant that the Prophet of Islam made Abu Bakr lead the prayer several times. This stand of the Prophet was to make it clear to the people that the appointment of the leader of the believers should be in accordance with the opinion of the people and not by appointment. That is why after his death, when the companions gathered together at Saqifa Bani Saeda, an assembly hall in Madina, Abu Bakr was appointed the successor of the Prophet, after a long consultation. Although the Islamic system is democratic in its nature it would be however more appropriate to say that democracy in Islam is indirect democracy rather than direct. That is to say, the entire public is not consulted in the Islamic democratic system. Instead we find different methods in that golden period of Islam known as the pious caliphate.

None of the caliph of this period were appointed after consulting the public. Only the senior people available in Madinah were consulted.

This pattern was adopted concerning the appointment of all the four caliphs. With these standard examples during the pious caliphate before us, we should not be wrong in saying that the democratic system of Islam is almost the same as what is called indirect democracy in the jargon of today.

This system entailed selecting a central body after seeking the opinion of the public. This body then selected the caliph. That is why certain scholars have called this method '*Arbab hallo Aqd*', that is, the intellectuals, the leaders, those who have a say in society are responsible for selecting the caliph or their leader. That is to say that this decision-making body will be formed by public opinion and this body in turn

will be entrusted with the task of selecting the leader.

We gather from our study that the political structure of Islam is not an unchangeable, rigid structure but has sufficient flexibility to suit the circumstances. For instance, the selection of Abu Bakr at Saqifa Banu Saida took place after a discussion among the companions, while Umar Faruq was appointed by Abu Bakr Siddiq, the leader of the believers himself, during his last days. Then the third caliph was selected by a six member board nominated by caliph Umar. So far as the selection of the fourth Caliph is concerned, it took place in an emergency situation, due to the murder of the third caliph Usman; the circumstances did not allow holding normal discussions. Therefore a group of Muslims declared Ali ibn abi Talib to be the fourth Caliph and the Muslim community accepted his Caliphate. Then during the Umayyad period Umar ibn Abdul Aziz (8th Umayyad Caliph) as caliph, who is known as the fifth pious caliph was selected. His election took place in the following manner. The preceding caliph Sulaiman ibn Abdul Malik, had left his will in a sealed envelope with instructions that it should be opened only after his death. So this letter was opened in the mosque of Damascus after his demise.

This announcement was made by Reja ibn Haywa, who was appointed by Sulayman to read out this will to the large number of people gathered in the mosque. It was an official announcement of the nomination of Umar ibn Abdul Aziz as caliph. But Umar ibn Abdul Aziz declared it publicly that he was returning this nomination to the people and it was up to them to choose whoever they wanted. At this turn of event, all the people gathered in the mosque chorussed: "We accept you as our caliph." Only after this general consent did Umar accept the caliphate.

The first phase of Islamic history is known as the golden phase. There is no doubt about it that consultation is an established practice in Islam and we see this from the precedent set in this golden period. Yet there is a high degree of flexibility in the principle of consultation in Islam. It is not a hard and fast rule. That is why we find that all the five caliphs were appointed by different methods. Then another fact is that the area of this principle of flexibility in Islamic democracy is very vast. As we see during the Umayyad period, Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan, the founder of the Umayyad Caliphate, nominated his son to succeed him. This was clearly the way of kingship or dynastic rule, going patently against the precedents set in the golden period. But this method introduced by Muawiya became so common that it was adopted by almost all the succeeding caliphs right from Muawiya to Aurangzeb. Yet the Islamic scholars in general accepted their caliphates giving them their silent approval. This shows that there is great flexibility in the Islamic concept of democracy based on consultation.

This flexibility goes to the extent of even accepting dynastic kingship, if circumstances demand it. As for the governments established on the principle of dynastic rule, the scholars held the view that a government's fulfilling its social, economic and religious responsibilities was more important than this or that political structure.

That is why in later history we find that although the Muslim scholars did not react to this dynastic rule, they did speak out openly about their responsibilities towards social justice.

The religious scholars never shirked their role of reminding the kings of their social duty. Most of the scholars refrained from accepting any government post so that they might not have to yield to any undue pressure. They thought that by remaining independent they would be able to play their role of censuring the policies of the government and of reminding the rulers of their duties. Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi, known as Mujaddid Alf Sani, provides an excellent example of what role the religious scholars had to play to keep the kings in check.

That is why in later periods of Islamic history, when dynastic rule had become the order of the day among the Muslims, the rulers, more or less, could not deviate far from the Islamic principles of justice. For instance, the ruler had to come to the mosque to pray with the public, he had to spend the money of the Treasury to fulfil the requirements of the public, he had to discharge his religious responsibilities and see to it that the public had no difficulty in discharging its religious rites.

Anyone could approach the kings to register his or her complaint. And there was a proper arrangement by the government for the free religious education of the people, etc.

From our study of the Quran, Hadith and Islamic history, we come to this conclusion:

1. The position of political rule in Islam is not that of the target of action, but is rather the result of action. That is to say, fulfilling the criteria of faith and good deeds alone makes one deserving of political power.
2. There is no hard and fast rule for the political structure in Islam. Rather we find great flexibility.
3. Although there may be adjustment so far as the political structure is concerned, there can be no adjustment or concession so far as the Islamic spirit is concerned.
4. According to the study of the hadith, our actions towards political reform will be limited to the giving of advice, *i.e.* by peaceful means. This will never go to the extent of launching violent movements aimed at ousting the rulers. As the traditions have it: "When you find corruption among the rulers, you must pay your due and ask your due from God. It is as if the principle of Jesus Christ is also accepted in Islam: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Luke: 20:26).

The Quran tells us: "God enjoins you to do justice. This justice in its basic sense, pertains to individual character. It demands that everyone in his personal life should develop a character based on justice. When the number of these just people grows into a large group, then they desire to lead their lives based on justice at the congregational or social level. Thus when this social life manifests itself in the form of an organized social institution, it is called the state in Islamic terminology. This action (the desire to lead a just life) will be called just character from the individual point of view and this same action at the social level will be the mainspring of the just state.

Concept of Worship in Islam

Worship according to the Quran (51:56) is the ultimate purpose of the creation of man. In Islamic terminology worship is called *Ibadah* which literally means devotional service with total devotion and sincerity. *Ibadah* is defined as putting oneself willingly, wholeheartedly and humbly to carry out the commandments of God in all matters of life and death. This concept of *Ibadah* entails that one should first realize his relation with God. It is the relation of a humble slave (*abd*) to his Supreme Master. In this relation the only appropriate attitude and behaviour for the slave is to surrender himself without any reservation to the will of his Master. He has no right to raise any doubt regarding His supreme authority or any objection or question as to why his master asked him to do or not to do something. (21:23) When a person succeeds in developing such a relation with God he becomes *abd*, the true servant, and God becomes his Ma'bud, the true object of worship. It is repeatedly emphasized both in the Quran and hadith that man's only concern in this life should be establish this relation of '*Abd* and Ma'bud' as perfectly as possible. Since all other concerns of life will be simultaneously taken care of by his Ma'bud. (2:186)

Whatever is needed for the survival, progress, multidimensional development and happiness of *Abd* is not only known to God but God is the only Provider of all these things (51:56). That is why the Quran has introduced God with reference to all this incomparably supreme quality is, such as Omniscient, Omnipotent, Provider of everything, Sustainer, Peace Giver, Creator of life and Death, Just, Merciful, Compassionate etc.

This introduction of God and His sublime attributes guide a person to the way of approaching Him what to expect and what not to expect from Him. Moreover, when he sincerely surrenders himself to God he knows that He will never disappoint or disown him. The more helpless he finds himself in carrying out this duty of worship, the more helpful his God will become towards him. The powerlessness of the '*Abd* simultaneously invites the all Powerfulness of Ma'bud to his rescue. According to the Quran and Hadith, everything in the universe, other than the humans and jinns is engaged in the worship of God (16:48). However, this worship by the entire universe is something imposed on it by the Creator Himself. That is why nothing in the whole universe can ever deviate even for a fraction of a second from the natural path set for it by the Almighty. Man, unlike the universe, is endowed with freedom of choice and independent will power. Islam invites man to reflect on the perfect universal model of worship, and expects him to willingly follow the same course. As a momentary deviation of anything in the universe from its divinely set course will cause its destructions. The man also will suffer the same fate if he deliberately deviates from the path of worship. An analysis of the Quranic verses related to God as 'Ma'bad', and man as His '*Abd*,' leads us to the following conclusions.

a) ***Ibadah* (worship) is an act of total submission of personality of a human being which comprises mind, soul and body.**

b) ***Ibadah* begins with the intellectual or conscious realization of God as Ma'bud (The only true object of worship) Then, every aspect of one's physical and spiritual existence has to be moulded**

shaped accordingly. Referring to this all-embracing nature, Ibadah is called in the Quran sibghat Allah, a Divine colouring: "This is God's dye and who has a better colour than Allah? And Him alone do we worship." (2:138).

c) Ibadah cannot be shared or divided. In other words, since God is one, He alone deserves to be worshipped. It is demeaning of Ibadah and degradation of Ma'bud to direct it towards anybody or anything in the universe other than God. Doing so is the gravest and 'unforgivable sin.' (4:48, 116).

The Quran repeatedly declares that all the Prophets and Messengers of God, without any exception, have unanimously invited mankind to "worship God alone, without associating with Him any partner." (2:21; 4:36; 16:36; 21:25). It was the deviation of the previous nations from this course of one God-oriented Ibadah, that led to their destruction. The pre-Quranic prophets are unanimous on this point. When a Jewish teacher of law asked Jesus this question of Ibadah, Jesus had this to say:

When he asked: "Which commandment is most important of all?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:29). According to the account of Matthew (22:34-40), Jesus added: "The second greatest and most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.'" "The whole law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets," he continued: "depend on these two commandments."

d) *Ibadah* makes the sincere performer 'humble', not only before God, but also in his day to day interaction with other human beings.

"The true servants of the Most Gracious." The Quran proclaims: "Are only they who walk gently on earth." (25:63).

"The servants of God." The Prophet once observed: "are not arrogant or proud." (Musnad Ahmad).

e) *Ibadah*, as stated above, is an all embracing activity which engages the triomind, soul and body both inwardly and outwardly in full coordination and integration.

It is neither a programme of 'meditation' performed exclusively in the realm of mind, nor a set of 'rituals' carried out by the body alone (8:35). Moreover, Ibadah is a life-long duty, not a time-bound activity. Hence, the Quran says, "Worship your sustainer till death comes to you." (15:99) The life without Ibadah is a living death (16:21). While dying in the service of God makes the servant 'eternally alive' (3:169).

Life and Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad

Its Relevance In A Global Context

Introduction

Books on Seerah (Life of the Prophet) exist in great numbers. These are no doubt valuable books in their own right. However, one aspect of Seerah still remains to be highlighted. And that is, the relevance of seerah in the modern world. It is a subject which, despite its great importance, has yet to be treated with sufficient thoroughness.

The books written on the subject of seerah give extensive coverage to miracles, wars and victories. Emphasis on these matters appeals to the conventional mind, but it has no appeal for modern man. These things do not address his mind. The modern man thinks in terms of science and not in terms of miracles. He thinks in terms of peace and not in terms of war. He is more interested in solutions to human, social and economic problems, rather than descriptions of political and military conquests. A thing becomes understandable to the modern man only when it is presented within the framework of reason rather than beliefs.

I have planned my book keeping in view this most urgent, present day requirement. I want to present a book which is not just a repetition of the books already written, but one whose aim would be to fulfil modern intellectual requirements, focusing on the relevance of the Prophet of Islam in contemporary global context.

Another important thing which is lacking in most of the books of Seerah is that they do not underscore the peaceful method followed by the Prophet.

A deep study of Seerah tells us that the Prophet invariably adopted the peaceful method unilaterally. He thus succeeded in bringing about a bloodless revolution in Arabia. Unfortunately, this aspect of Seerah has not been highlighted in existing biographies of the Prophet.

In present times, owing to certain global concerns, the propensity to study Islam has greatly increased. All over the world, curiosity has been aroused as to what exactly is meant by Islam.

What is urgently needed, therefore, is an objective, in-depth study of Islam—one which presents Islam as it actually is, uncompromisingly and without bias. It is in order to meet this need—in particular, to show how Islam can meet the challenge of violence—that I have undertaken the venture of presenting Islam as it is in the light of Prophet's life and teachings.

Part One

SEERAH

Biographical Sketch

Chapter One

Arabia before Islam

WITH an area of 1,20,000 square miles the land of Arabia is the largest peninsula in the world. It has the Red Sea to the West, the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden to the south-east and the rivers Euphrates and Tigris and the Persian Gulf to the north-east. It thus occupies a unique position. It is situated in Asia, yet only the narrow Red Sea divides it from Africa and by just passing through the Suez Canal, one reaches the Mediterranean Sea and Europe. It is thus at the centre of three continents, yet it is apart from all of them.

Arabia being a very hot and dry country, one third of it is desert. It is strange that a land surrounded by water on three sides, and with only a narrow strip of land to the north, has practically no river of its own, except for small streams here and there, which soon dry up in the hot desert.

Rain too is scarce. The rains come in torrents in spring, but the water does not stay. It is lost in the sand as quickly as it comes. There being no dependable rainy season, which is necessary for agriculture, this vast land, about a thousand kilometres wide and about the same in length, is neither fertile nor cultivable.

Yemen, the original home of the Semites, is the only exception, in that it is fertile and enjoys a rainy season. Besides this, the rest of the peninsula consists of barren valleys and deserts. Due to the lack of vegetation, life here can be only that of the desert. The camel, the only means of transportation is indispensable, for a desert life demands continuous movement. The desert dwellers must continually go in search of pastures, which are scarce and thin, and soon cropped bare. The pastures turn green around spring, watered by springs which form in the wake of occasional rainfalls. In such an infertile country where no agriculture has ever been possible, the only produce is dates. In the context of this civilization, Yemen has always been very developed in terms of agriculture. Showing great intelligence the Yemenis invented ways of saving rain water from running down to the sea so that artificial irrigation could be carried out. Moreover, they built the famous dam of Maarib by changing the natural course of the water. This water is gathered in a 400 meter wide valley between two mountains by constructing a dam with gates at the narrowest point in the valley.

Then this water is divided into many streams and spread over a wide area of plains. It is almost like the Nile in the dam area in Upper Egypt. In this way they have contrived to have a controlled distribution of their water. The fertility of their land has gone on increasing and the people of Yemen have become very prosperous.

Makkah

When Hajira's infant son started crying for water she ran desperately between the hills of Safa and Marwah in search of water. She ran seven times when finally she discovered a spring of water gushing from the ground by the side of her son. It was this spring which is known as Zamzam. Makkah is founded at this spring spot of Zamzam.

Both Makkah and Madinah were, and still are, islands in a sea of desert. These towns were initially inhabited by the descendants of the nomads, who still retained many of the desert born habits of their ancestors.

Situated in a valley, Makkah is one of the oldest cities in the world. It is a desert, with no vegetation, no date-palms.

There are some fertile spots in the desert, which are called oases. There are also springs of water here and there, although grass and palm trees grow. These springs of water are scattered all over the desert. Large as well as small clans settle around the oases.

Makkah since ancient times was an important centre for the caravans coming from the south with valuable merchandise. They brought gold, precious stones and spices from Africa to Yemen. From here it was taken to the markets of Syria, Egypt and many other places on the backs of camels.

The merchants travelled in caravans for the sake of safety. For in those days caravans were an easy target. Since these caravans passed through vast stretches of uninhabited deserts, it was easy for plunderers to rob them of all their merchandise.

At Makkah agriculture not being possible, the city thrived on commerce. Makkah became an important trading centre because of the Sanctuary – the Kabah, to visit which people came from places far and near. Its geographical position was very good from the point of view of trade, it being situated at the crossroads of the routes from Yemen to Syria and Abyssinia to Arabia. So the nomads came to Makkah from all sides. By the 6th century, Arab traders had become very influential and controlled the trade from Yemen to Syria. Taif was also an important commercial centre but Makkah was more important because of the Kabah.

So Makkah became a religious as well as a financial centre. By the time the Prophet conquered Makkah, we find many influential traders who were adept at doing business with different parts of the world. Although Yemen was the most advanced province in the Arabian Peninsula because of its water

resources and sound administration, Makkah being a religious centre wielded greater influence on this account. Makkah, a focal point of pilgrimage dating back to the origin of Arab history, owed its status to the Kabah, which had been built by Ibrahim and Ismail.

Everyone observed its holy months for religious reasons as well as on account of the special position it enjoyed with regard to trade, being the capital of the peninsula.

The Arabs of the North are considered *Arab al mustaribah*, "Arabized Arabs." The Qahtanis of the South are considered *Arab al Mutaarribah*, or tribes resulting from mixing with the *Arab al Aribah*, original, or true Arabs. From the Qahtanis descend the Arabs of ancient South Arabia, or "Himyarite" Kingdoms. The completely "true Arabs", descendants of Aram, son of Shem, son of Noah, are called the *Arab al baidah*, "the lost Arabs", their identity having been submerged in that of other peoples.

The progeny of Ismail were known as *Mustariba*, or naturalised Arabs, and they greatly multiplied. They were divided into many tribes and clans. The Quraysh, the largest tribe, descending from the Kinanah and Ismail, had several clans. They were settled in Makkah by an ancestor of renown called Qusayy, who displaced the previous inhabitants, the Khuzaah. The clans who lived in the vicinity of the Kabah were considered most honourable. These were called *Quraysh al Bitah* (the Quraysh of the Hollow).

The location of Makkah on important caravan routes across the Peninsula, and the prestige of the Kabah in the age of Ignorance (Jahiliyyah) gave it great advantages as a trading city. This is why the Quraysh became one of the richest and most powerful tribes. This, together with their descent from the Kinanah and Ismail, gave them claims to an aristocratic pre-eminence.

The Prophet Muhammad was of the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh, who lived in the vicinity of the Kabah and enjoyed great honour and prestige in Arabia. These clans were divided into families. Besides these Arabs there were also Christian and Jews who lived in Arabia. A large number of their population lived in Madinah.

In Arabia there are two different geographical types of soil markedly different from one another – the oasis and the desert. The inhabitants of Arabia naturally fall into two main groups: nomadic and settled people. The city dwellers settled in one place and lived on cultivation because they knew how to till the land and grow corn. They engaged in commerce not only within their own country, but also abroad. But the Bedouins, being nomads, disliked the idea of a settled life and wandered from place to place with their families and belongings. Prof. Hitti in his book the *History of the Arabs*, writes: "The Bedouin is no gypsy roaming aimlessly for the sake of roaming. He represents the best adaptation of human life to desert conditions." (p. 23)

They lived in tents and possessed goats, camels and horses. They were continually on the move in search of pastures and when they halted temporarily they lived in tents or camps. They engaged for

economic reasons in horse-breeding, hunting, camel raising, etc. They thought that these were the only occupations worthy of a man. They disliked agriculture, trade and commerce. In the desert the basic unit of life is not the state but the tribe. The Bedouins attach the greatest importance to total freedom for the individual as well as the tribe, but this was not the case with the city-dwellers. They attached importance not only to freedom but also to peace, security and prosperity. Another feature of tribal life, is the belief in absolute equality. All the members of the tribe are treated equally. This is because of the influence of the desert, with the freedom of its vast limitless expanses. If they had any injustice forced upon them, which they could not bear or confront, they left behind their pasture and moved on to another place where there would be no injustice—only freedom and equality. In times of conflict, they depended upon the sword. It was considered as a prerequisite for the individual to be able to defend himself and his tribe.

The nomadic life is based upon stockbreeding, especially the breeding of camels. There is some rain in the winter season and then some vegetation comes up in the low-lying areas. These areas become a paradise for camels, as they provide the best pasture, but with the coming of summer the pasture vanishes. Then the nomads move on in search of other green areas in order to feed themselves as well as their camels. Then there are some wells, which provide water for the camels. The milk of the camels is the diet of the nomads along with dates, which are obtained from the oases. Cereals are not easily available. Only the rich can afford them. The oases that are found in Madinah are near the mountains. So there the date crop is grown. And in Taif, which has very fertile soil, cereals are grown. Madinah has the largest of the oases.

Ibrahim was the first to teach them the worship of one God. The Arabs followed the religion of Ibrahim for some generations, but their later generations tended to deviate from the straight path shown to them by Ibrahim and became idolators. At the time of the birth of the Prophet, the whole of Arabia had taken to idolatry. Some of the tribes worshipped stars and planets, some stone idols, and, thus the Kabah, which had been built for the worship of God became a centre of idolatry. It housed 360 idols, one for each day of the year. Hubal was the most honoured. Carved in red stone, it held seven arrows in its hand. Among the Arabs lots were drawn to decide all important matters.

The Quraysh were the most influential tribe in Makkah. Most of them were engaged in trade, and some of them were great traders. The name Quraysh is derived from a word which means to trade.

Since the Quraysh was the largest and most powerful tribe in Makkah, its chief was the most influential man in Makkah.

The Characteristics of the Arab People

Islam emerged in a region known as Hijaz, inhabited by the descendants of Ismael and Banu Kinanah. These people had access only to limited resources, limited habitable area, cattle, pasture and oases. Everything was in short supply. So they could afford to lead an extremely simple life.

Due to these constraints they often waged war, sometimes to take possession of the limited reservoirs of water and pastures. Nevertheless, these Bedouins had noble human qualities. For they lived very very far from the artificial world of civilization. The atmosphere of nature served as a vast school of nature for them. They never led the artificial life of the cities and their life was devoid of all formalities. This extremely simple, austere life made them realists.

All this was responsible for producing in them the qualities which the Arabs call *al muruwah*, manliness, which meant to them acknowledging the truth, speaking nothing but the truth, fulfilling promises, honouring obligations, supporting the oppressed, boldness, noble character, patience, generosity and hospitality. When this high level of humanity was combined with the truth of Islam, they were enabled to perform great feats. It was this truth which has been thus expressed in a hadith:

"Those who were good people in the days of ignorance will also be good people during Islam."

In ancient Arabia despite their battles, wars, conflicts and tensions, their vows of revenge, which went on for generation after generation, their mentality, their thinking, their aptitude for acknowledging the truth were fully preserved.

For instance, once in ancient Makkah two groups were ready to fight. At this juncture, Abu Sufyan ibn Harb intervened and said to them: "If you waged a war so many people would be killed belonging to both the groups. So should I not tell you something better?" They agreed with him. Then Abu Sufyan said: "What has passed has passed, now you must make peace." Both the parties accepted his advice there and then and made peace. This was in spite of the fact that there were people who used to go on fighting for as long even as 50 years to avenge a murder or an insult or any injustice done to them.

Due to the paucity of economic resources, there were people who indulged in looting. But even these people were of a noble character. Once a Bedouin wanted to rob a woman who was all alone in her tent decked with jewellery. But he did not enter the tent. He stood at the door and commanded her to take off all her jewellery and hand it over to him.

While the woman was taking off her jewellery, the man stood at the door with his back towards it, so that he did not catch sight of the woman while she was taking off her jewellery.

These Arabs had not been idol worshippers since ancient times. Idolatry was only a later intro-

duction into their lives through foreign influence. The idols were imported into Arabia. So there was no ideology behind this idol worship. It was thus of a superficial nature, having no deep ideological or philosophical root. For instance, once an Arab wanted to take revenge for his father. So he went to an idol called Dhul Khalasa for divining arrows. But the answer that came from the idol was not in the affirmative. This enraged the Arab and, addressing the idol, he uttered these words: O Dhul Khalasa, had your father been killed you would never have uttered this falsehood that the oppressor should not be punished."

Similarly, another Arab led his camels to his idol Sad in order to seek its blessing. It was a tall idol, and was covered in blood due to the sacrifices made to it. On seeing this sight, the camels were frightened and ran away. When the Arab saw the flight of his camels, he hit the idol with a stone, abusing him:

"May God destroy you. I had come to seek your blessings and you made my camels run away."

Of these ancient Arabs there were a sizeable number who were known as Hanif. These people were truth seekers and they shunned idolatry. They lived an aloof, social life. They used to say:

"O, God, I do not know how You should be worshipped. Had I known, I would have certainly worshipped you in that manner."

These circumstances of the ancient Arabs and their moral qualities had a close affinity with Islam. These people true in nature, were as if potential converts of Islam. Therefore when the Prophet of Islam began his preaching in 610, these Hanifs took no time in responding to his call and became his devoted companions, Abu Bakr ibn Abi Qahafa being one of those Hunafa. What distinguished the Arabs from others was that they could not afford to reject a truth when it had become clear to them. That is why in the initial stage of the Prophet's call, due to some misunderstanding, a number of them turned against the Prophet Muhammad. But when finally they learned that what the Prophet was telling them was nothing but the truth, they took no time in entering the fold of Islam. There are a number of incidents in the books of Seerah to this effect.

Thus the sending of the Final Prophet was not without reason. It was a well-planned decision of God which He in His Own knowledge decreed. These Arabs were the living people who were selected by God to lend full support to His final Prophet, so that he might fulfil the divine mission.

THE SECOND SURAH ALBAQARH (THE COW)

verse 180 to verse 195

180. IT IS ordained for you, when death approaches any of you and he is leaving behind much wealth, to make bequests in favour of his parents and [other] near of kin in accordance with what is fair: ¹⁵² this is binding on all who are conscious of God.
181. And if anyone alters such a provision after having come to know it, the sin of acting thus shall fall only upon those who have altered it. ¹⁵³ Verily, God is all-hearing, all-knowing.
182. If, however, one has reason to fear that the testator has committed a mistake or a [deliberate] wrong, and thereupon brings about a settlement between the heirs, ¹⁵⁴ he will incur no sin [thereby] Verily, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.
183. O YOU who have attained to faith! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you, so that you might remain conscious of God:
184. [fasting] during a certain number of days. ¹⁵⁵ But whoever of you is ill, or on a journey, [shall fast instead for the same] number of other days; and [in such cases] it is incumbent upon those who can afford it to make sacrifice by feeding a needy person. ¹⁵⁶ And whoever does more good than he is bound to do ¹⁵⁷ does good unto himself thereby; for to fast is to do good unto yourselves -if you but knew it.
185. It was the month of Ramaqan in which the Qur'an was [first] bestowed from on high as a guidance unto man and a self-evident proof of that guidance, and as the standard by which to discern the true from the false. Hence, whoever of you lives to see ¹⁵⁸ this month shall fast throughout it; but he that is ill, or on a journey, [shall fast instead for the same] number of other days. God wills that you shall have ease, and does not will you to suffer hardship; but [He desires] that you complete the number [of days required], and that you extol God for His having guided you aright, and that you render your thanks [unto Him].
186. AND IF My servants ask thee about Me -behold I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls unto Me: let them, then, respond unto Me, and believe in Me, so that they might follow the right way.
187. IT IS lawful for you to go in unto your wives during the night preceding the [day's] fast: they are as a garment for you, and you are as a garment for them. ' God is aware that you would have deprived yourselves of this right ¹⁵⁹ and so He has turned unto you in His mercy and removed this hardship from you. Now, then, you may lie with them skin to skin, and avail yourselves of that which God has ordained for you, ¹⁶⁰ and eat and drink until you can discern the white streak of dawn against the blackness of night, ¹⁶¹ and then resume fasting until nightfall; but do not lie with them skin to skin when you are about to abide in meditation in houses of worship. ¹⁶² These are the bounds set by God: do not, then, offend against them -[for] it is thus that God makes clear His messages unto mankind, so

that they might remain conscious of Him.

188. AND DEVOUR NOT one another's possessions wrongfully, and neither employ legal artifices ¹⁶³ with a view to devouring sinfully, and knowingly, anything that by right belongs to others. ¹⁶⁴
189. THEY WILL ASK thee about the new moons. Say: "They indicate the periods for [various doings of] mankind, including the pilgrimage. ¹⁶⁵ However, piety does not consist in your entering houses from the rear, [as it were,] but truly pious is he who is conscious of God. ¹⁶⁶ Hence, enter houses through their doors, and remain conscious of God, so that you might attain to a happy state.
190. AND FIGHT in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression -for, verily, God does not love aggressors. ¹⁶⁷
191. And slay them wherever you may come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away -for oppression is even worse than killing. ¹⁶⁸ And fight not against them near the Inviolable House of Worship unless they fight against you there first; ¹⁶⁹ but if they fight against you, slay them: such shall be the recompense of those who deny the truth.
192. But if they desist-behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.
193. Hence, fight against them until there is no more oppression and all worship is devoted to God alone; ¹⁷⁰ but if they desist, then all hostility shall cease, save against those who [wilfully] do wrong.
194. Fight during the sacred months if you are attacked: ¹⁷¹ for a violation of sanctity is [subject to the law of] just retribution. Thus, if anyone commits aggression against you, attack him just as he has attacked you -but remain conscious of God, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him: ¹⁷²
195. And spend [freely] in God's cause, and let not your own hands throw you into destruction. ¹⁷³ and persevere in doing good : behold, God loves the doers of good.

152. The word khayr occurring in this sentence denotes "much wealth" and not simply "property": and this explains the injunction that one who leaves much wealth behind should make bequests to particularly deserving members of his family in addition to and preceding the distribution of the legally-fixed shares mentioned in 4: 11-12. This interpretation of khayr is supported by sayings of 'A' ishah and "Ali ibn Abi Talib, both of them referring to this particular verse (cf. Zamakhshari and Baydawi).
153. Lit., "and as for him who alters it" -i.e., after the testator's death "after having heard it, the sin thereof is only upon those who alter it": that is, not on anyone who may have unwittingly benefited by this alteration. It is to be noted that the verb sami'a (lit., "he heard") has also the connotation of "he came to know".
154. Lit., "between them" -i.e., a settlement overriding the testamentary provisions which, by common consent of the parties concerned, are considered unjust.
155. I.e., during the twenty-nine or thirty days of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see next verse). It consists of a total abstention from food, drink and sexual intercourse from dawn until sunset. As the Qur'an points out, fasting has been widely practiced at all times of man's religious history. The extreme rigour and the long duration of the Islamic fast -which is incumbent on every healthy adult, man or woman -fulfils, in addition to the general aim of spiritual purification, a threefold purpose: (1) to commemorate the beginning of the Qur'anic revelation, which took place in the month of Ramadan about thirteen years before the Prophet's exodus to Medina; (2) to provide an exacting exercise of self-discipline; and (3) to make everyone realize, through his or her own experience, how it feels to be hungry and thirsty, and thus to gain a true appreciation of the needs of the poor.
156. This phrase has been subject to a number of conflicting and sometimes highly laboured interpretations. My rendering is based on the primary meaning of *alladhina yuttiquunahu* ("those who are capable of it" or "are able to do it" or "can afford it"), with the pronoun *hu* relating to the act of feeding a needy person".
157. Some commentators are of the opinion that this refers to a voluntary feeding of more than one needy person, or to feeding the needy for more than the number of days required by the above ordinance. Since, however, the remaining part of the sentence speaks of the benefits of fasting as such, it is more probable that "doing more good than one is bound to do" refers, in this context, to supererogatory fasting (such as the Prophet sometimes undertook) apart from the obligatory one during the month of Ramadan.
158. Lit., "witnesses" or "is present in".
159. Lit., "deceived" or "defrauded yourselves [in this respect]": an allusion to the idea prevalent among the early Muslims, before the revelation of this verse, that during the period of fasting all sexual intercourse should be avoided, even at night-time, when eating and drinking are allowed (Razi). The above verse removed this misconception.

160. Lit., "and seek that which God has ordained for you": an obvious stress on the God-willed nature of sexual life.
161. Lit., "the white line of dawn from the black line [of night]". According to all Arab philologists, the "black line" (*al-khayt al-aswad*) signifies "the blackness of night" (Lane II, 831); and the expression *al-khaytan* ("the two lines" or "streaks") denotes "day and night" (*Lisan al-c Arab*).
162. It was the practice of the Prophet to spend several days and nights during Ramadan –and occasionally also at other times –in the mosque, devoting himself to prayer and meditation to the exclusion of all worldly activities; and since he advised his followers as well to do this from time to time, seclusion in a mosque for the sake of meditation, called *itikaf*, has become a recognized- though optional- mode of devotion among Muslims, especially during the last ten days of Ramadan.
163. Lit., "and do not throw it to the judges" -i.e., with a view to being decided by them contrary to what is right (Zamakhshari, Baydawi).
164. Lit., "a part of [other] people's possessions".
165. The reference, at this stage, to lunar months arises from the fact that the observance, of several of the religious obligations instituted by Islam -like the fast of Ramadan, or the pilgrimage to Mecca (which is dealt with in verses 196-203) - is based on the lunar calendar, in which the months rotate through the seasons of the solar year. This fixation on the lunar calendar results in a continuous variation of the seasonal circumstances in which those religious observances are performed (e.g., the length of the fasting-period between dawn and sunset, heat or cold at the time of the fast or the pilgrimage), and thus in a corresponding, periodical increase or decrease of the hardship involved. In addition to this, reckoning by lunar months has a bearing on the tide and ebb of the oceans, as well as on human physiology (e.g., a woman's monthly courses -a subject dealt with later on in this *surah*).
166. I.e., true piety does not consist in approaching questions of faith through a "back door", as it were that is, through mere observance of the forms and periods set for the performance of various religious duties (cf. 2: 177). However important these forms and time-limits may be in themselves, they do not fulfil their real purpose unless every act is approached through its spiritual "front door", that is, through God-consciousness. Since, metonymically, the word *bab* ("door") signifies "a means of access to, or of attainment of, a thing" (see Lane I, 272), the metaphor of "entering a house through its door" is often used in classical Arabic to denote a proper approach to a problem *Razi*).
167. This and the following verses lay down unequivocally that only self-defence (in the widest sense of the word) makes war permissible for Muslims. Most of the commentators agree in that the expression *la ta tadu* signifies, in this context, "do not commit aggression"; while by *al-mu tadin* "those who commit aggression" are meant. The defensive character of a fight "in God's cause" - that is, in the cause of the ethical principles ordained by God -is, moreover, self-evident in the reference to "those who wage war against you", and has been still further clarified in 22: 39 - "permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged"- which, according to all available Traditions, constitutes the earliest (and therefore fundamental) Quranic

reference to the question of jihad, or holy war (see Tabari and Ibn Kathir in their commentaries on 22: 39). That this early, fundamental principle of self-defence as the only possible justification of war has been maintained throughout the Qur'an is evident from 60 : 8, as well as from the concluding sentence of 4: 91, both of which belong to a later period than the above verse.

168. In view of the preceding ordinance, the injunction "slay them wherever you may come upon them" is valid only within the context of hostilities already in progress (Razi), on the understanding that "those who wage war against you" are the aggressors or oppressors (a war of liberation being a war "in God's cause"). The translation, in this context, of *fitnah* as "oppression" is justified by the application of this term to any affliction which may cause man to go astray and to lose his faith in spiritual values (*cf. Lisan al-Arab*).
169. This reference to warfare in the vicinity of Mecca is due to the fact that at the time of the revelation of this verse the Holy City was still in the possession of the pagan Quraysh, who were hostile to the Muslims. However -as is always the case with historical references in the Qur'an -the above injunction has a general import, and is valid for all times and circumstances.
170. Lit., "and religion belongs to God [alone]" -i.e., until God can be worshipped without fear of persecution, and none is compelled to bow down in awe before another human being. (See also 22: 40.) The term *din* is in this context more suitably translated as "worship" inasmuch as it comprises here both the doctrinal and the moral aspects of religion: that is to say, man's faith as well as the obligations arising from that faith.
171. This is a free rendering of the phrase "the sacred month for the sacred month", which is interpreted by all commentators in the sense given above. The "sacred months" during which, according to ancient Arab custom, all fighting was deemed utterly wrong, were the first, seventh, eleventh and twelfth months of the lunar calendar.
172. Thus, although the believers are enjoined to fight back whenever they are attacked, the concluding words of the above verse make it clear that they must, when fighting, abstain from all atrocities, including the killing of non-combatants.
173. I.e., "you might bring about your own destruction by withholding your personal and material contribution to this common effort".

